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Central Intelligence Agency



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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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A Contingency Study on a Greek-Turkish Military ConfrontationSummary

A war between Greece and Turkey is improbable given present circumstances. However, the volatility of relations between the two countries -- they clashed on Cyprus in 1974 and nearly came to blows twice later in the decade over Aegean oil exploration rights -- and the negative implications for the US and NATO of fighting between them suggest that the possibility of such a development must be taken seriously. This paper is an attempt to lay out the current disputes that could provide impulse for a Greek-Turkish clash, to describe how the fighting might unfold, and to calculate the impact of such an event on US interests. [redacted]

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The Greek-Turkish quarrel continues to center on conflicting claims about resource rights and territorial limits in the Aegean. These disputes spill over into other areas, hindering agreement between Athens and Ankara on NATO command and control responsibilities in the Aegean and heightening bilateral tensions over Cyprus and other issues. Although both sides presently appear intent on avoiding military conflict, the chances of war would increase over the longer term if either side gained a clear military advantage or if the domestic situation in either country became unstable. [redacted]

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We believe the most likely spark for conflict would be an accident -- probably an inadvertent air clash -- that could lead to extended air-to-air combat or even escalate into combined air, naval, and ground operations in the Aegean. A calculated attack -- a Turkish assault on a Greek island, for example, or a Greek strike at Turkish airfields -- is far less likely but might come about if either side grew frustrated with the negotiation process or suspected that the other was about to launch a preemptive attack. There is rough strategic parity between the two sides, but we think that superior equipment and training would give the Greeks an edge in air and naval combat in the Aegean, while superior numbers would give the Turks a clear-cut advantage on Cyprus. The two would be about evenly matched in the border area of Thrace, and fighting there would probably end in a stalemate. Whatever form the fighting took, a war would almost certainly be short and very costly for both sides.

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Although hostilities between Greece and Turkey would have unwelcome repercussions for the USSR, whose access to the Mediterranean would be hindered by conflict involving the Turkish Straits or the Aegean, Moscow would be the net beneficiary of fighting between the two NATO allies. Any such conflict would seriously impair Allied ability to monitor and respond to Soviet activity within and adjacent to the Eastern Mediterranean. And if either Greece or Turkey perceived a US tilt toward the other, the offended country almost certainly would shut down US facilities, possibly withdraw from NATO, or do both.

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The Issues

Tensions in Greek-Turkish relations since the early 1970s stem largely, although not entirely, from a tangled web of conflicting claims in the Aegean that touch on Greek and Turkish national security interests. Greeks across the political spectrum see Turkey as a growing regional power with designs on Greek territory, particularly in the Aegean. For their part, the Turks believe that Greece is seeking to preempt legitimate Turkish rights in the area -- a perception intensified by the election of Andreas Papandreou as Greek Prime Minister in 1981. Concerned that the semi-enclosed Aegean will gradually become a "Greek lake," Turkey has argued for the principle of equity in the Aegean.

- o Continental shelf rights: Greece maintains that its inhabited islands have their own continental shelves--a view bolstered by international conventions. Turkey argues that many of the Greek islands lie on the Anatolian shelf, and it demands an equal share in

the economic exploitation and distribution of the Aegean's seabed resources -- an issue made more urgent in Ankara's eyes by the discovery of oil there in the early 1970s.

- o Territorial waters: Greece's territorial waters currently are set at six nautical miles, but Athens reserves the right to extend its boundaries to twelve nautical miles. Ankara argues that this would cut off Turkey's direct access to international waters and has made known that such an extension would constitute a casus belli.
- o Airspace and air traffic control: Since the early 1930s, Greece has claimed an airspace of ten nautical miles around its islands, and it has international sanction to supervise all civilian flights in the Aegean. Athens has insisted that all Turkish aircraft entering its Flight Information Region file flight plans. Turkey recognizes an airspace of only six nautical miles around the islands and, like the United States, refuses to file plans for military flights, claiming that such flights do not affect safety in the area and therefore do not come under the provisions governing commercial air traffic.
- o NATO command and control: Until Greece's withdrawal from the military wing of NATO in 1974, Alliance command and control responsibility in the Aegean fell to Athens. Under the NATO plan that provided for Greece's return to the military wing in 1980, command and control responsibility in the Aegean was assigned to the Commander-in-Chief, Allied Forces, Southern Europe, pending the resolution of the disputes between Greece and Turkey. Greece is seeking to regain its pre-1974 responsibilities, while Turkey is pressing for some formula that would allow for joint control. The lack of progress on the issue reflects each side's concern that an agreement might prejudice its other claims in the Aegean.
- o The militarization of the Aegean islands: Greece claims that the right of national self-defense overrides any treaty provisions -- which, in any case, the Greeks regard as equivocal on the issue -- providing for the demilitarization of its Aegean islands. It justifies the upgrading of its defenses on the islands by pointing to the Turkish invasion of Cyprus and the creation after 1974 of the Turkish Aegean Army based in Izmir. Turkey argues that the treaties under which the islands were ceded to Greece dictate that they remain demilitarized.
- o Minorities: Greece and Turkey periodically accuse each other of discriminating against the ethnic communities living under their respective jurisdictions. Greece's Muslim minority resides primarily in Thrace--close to the Turkish border--and on the island of Rhodes. The ethnic Greeks in Turkey live primarily in Istanbul and Izmir and on the islands of Imbros and Tenedos. Each side accuses

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the other of failing to respect the safeguards for minority communities outlined by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne.

- o Cyprus: Although not strictly a bilateral issue, the unresolved Cyprus problem has exacerbated the disputes in the Aegean. Greece points to the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974 as proof of what it views as Ankara's aggressive intentions and has called for the withdrawal of Turkish troops as a precondition for meaningful negotiations between the two Cypriot communities. Turkey claims that it was the Athens-inspired coup against then President and Archbishop Makarios that prompted its intervention and that, as one of the original treaty guarantors of Cypriot independence, it had the right to intervene in order to protect the constitutional order. Ankara also argues that it must maintain a military presence in order to protect the Turkish Cypriot minority pending an acceptable resolution of intercommunal differences.
- o The Armenian question: The assassination by Armenian terrorists of more than twenty Turkish diplomats over the past several years has heightened Ankara's sensitivity to the Armenian question. The Turks have accused the Cypriot government during the past year of harboring Armenian terrorists and have threatened to take action against such groups. The Greek Cypriots deny these charges and fear that Ankara might use Armenian terrorism as a pretext for launching a small-scale commando operation in Cyprus. Both Athens and Nicosia have said they would respond in kind.

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On occasion since 1974, the Greek and Turkish governments have each raised the level of tensions. Papandreou's rhetorical flourishes have tended to reinforce Turkish perceptions of an intransigent Greece. Similarly, Ankara's periodic penetrations of Greek-claimed airspace have tended to confirm Greek perceptions of an aggressive Turkey. At present, both parties appear intent on preventing minor incidents from mushrooming into open conflict, and in recent months they have taken tentative steps to renew the Greek-Turkish dialogue on outstanding Aegean issues.

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The chances of armed conflict would increase if either side gained a clear military advantage or if the domestic situation in either country became unstable. For example, a Greek government suffering from declining popularity and facing chaotic economic and social conditions might be tempted to overreact to a Turkish move or -- in the extreme -- even undertake a military operation against Turkey in order to distract public attention from pressing internal problems. The return to political factionalism in Turkey and a resurgence of social and economic turmoil could encourage Ankara to do likewise. Both sides recognize that the stakes of a generalized conflict are high. But, while this argues against a premeditated and large-scale military strike by either side, it does not rule out the possibility of a minor incident rapidly escalating to the level of a general conflict.

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Conflict Scenarios

Conflict in the Aegean could evolve in several ways and escalate to varying levels of intensity. It could be the result of an accident--such as an inadvertent air clash--or an outright act of aggression. Even in the event of an accident, fighting could quickly expand from involving just air forces, for example, to include naval and ground forces. In either case, we cannot rule out the possibility that fighting might spill over into Thrace or expand to include Cyprus. [REDACTED]

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There is rough strategic parity between the two sides, and we do not expect this to change drastically in the near future. The Greeks appear to have the upper hand in the Aegean, while the Turks have a clear-cut advantage on Cyprus. The two sides probably recognize their own strengths and weaknesses, and neither has any misconceptions about its inability to defeat the other in a protracted war. While the tactical military objectives for the Greeks and the Turks would differ under the various scenarios, we believe the underlying goal probably would be to win territory early in the conflict to use as a bargaining chip in peace negotiations [REDACTED]

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Whatever form the fighting took, a war involving more than small-scale skirmishes almost certainly would be short and costly for both sides. The duration of the conflict would depend largely on fuel and ammunition stocks on hand at the beginning of hostilities. We believe that, without external resupply, both Greece and Turkey would have difficulty sustaining intensive combat longer than one to two weeks. Both sides probably would have enough fuel at the outset to last at least that long, but both would quickly experience shortages of air-to-air and surface-to-air missiles. Hostilities could last substantially longer than two weeks if the two sides limited the scope of fighting to an air war of attrition, hit and run raids, or possibly border skirmishes in Thrace. [REDACTED]

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We believe the most likely cause of an unpremeditated war would be an inadvertent air clash in the Aegean. If fighting escalated, the two most probable scenarios would be:

- o Extended air-to-air combat.
- o Aerial combat that escalates into combined air, naval and ground operations in the Aegean.

In the event combat resulted from a calculated act of aggression, the following would be most likely:

- o A Turkish attempt to take Greek territory.
- o Greek air strikes on Turkish airfields. [REDACTED]

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Scenarios resulting from an unintentional outbreak of conflict

These scenarios would probably result from an aerial confrontation in the disputed six-to-ten mile airspace around the Greek islands. Political tensions probably would be on the rise, and posturing on both sides would bring about a situation in which one or more aircraft were shot down through miscalculation, accident, or an erroneous perception of military threat.

- o Unpremeditated air clash -- Each side's military objective following the initial incident would be to establish air superiority by seeking out and engaging the other country's fighters and possibly attacking its airfields with the intention of destroying aircraft. If the Greeks were to establish air superiority over the Aegean islands, they would then be able to interdict and disrupt any naval task force that the Turks might try to organize. Air superiority for the Turks, on the other hand, could enable them to patrol the Aegean almost at will and disrupt any attempt by the Greeks to reinforce their islands.

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- o Aerial combat that escalates into naval and ground operations -- Under this scenario, the military objectives for the Greeks--following or concurrent with attempts to achieve air superiority--would be to reinforce their island garrisons, protect the islands from a Turkish assault, and keep open their sea lines of communication. The Greeks might also begin posturing along the border in Thrace to prevent the Turks from moving additional troops south from the First Army to

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marshal an amphibious assault force. The Turkish objectives would be to use air and possibly naval forces to disrupt the Greek supply lines from the mainland in order to prevent the Greeks from reinforcing their islands. If the Turks were dominant in the air, they might even be tempted to try an assault on one of the Greek islands in order to reinforce Ankara's position in any negotiations following the fighting.

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We believe that in a naval confrontation in the Aegean the Greeks would at least be able to hold their own. At a minimum, the Greeks could probably maintain their sea lines of communication, although the Turks might be able to disrupt them for short periods of time. If the Greeks could achieve local air superiority, as seems likely, Turkish naval prospects would be even further diminished.

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Scenarios resulting from an outright act of aggression

Calculated aggression by one side or the other would probably stem from frustration with the negotiation process or from one side's suspicions that the other was preparing to launch a premeditated attack.

- o A Turkish attempt to take Greek territory -- The primary Turkish military objective in a premeditated attack almost certainly would be to take and hold Greek territory to use as a bargaining chip in negotiations. This could take the form of an attack in Thrace, an assault on a Greek island in the Aegean, or an attack in Cyprus. If

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[redacted]

the Turks attacked in Thrace, their objectives -- in addition to seizing territory--would be to tie down Greek forces and prevent Athens from reinforcing the Aegean islands or launching its own counteroffensive to seize the only river crossing point in Turkish Thrace. [redacted]

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The primary Greek objective in Thrace would be to stop a Turkish offensive, while extracting a high toll. It is also possible that the Greeks, in anticipation of a Turkish thrust, would initiate a limited offensive of their own to destroy bridges and to take the Turkish crossing point at the Evros River in an attempt to seal off the main Turkish forces. The Greeks would hope that any military activity on their part, including spoiling raids or minor border skirmishes, would also disrupt Turkish attempts to mass for an attack, as well as tie down Turkish forces that Ankara could otherwise shift southward for use in the Aegean.

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Recognizing the high costs of an operation in Thrace, even if they could succeed in taking some Greek territory, the Turks could opt instead to invade a Greek island. The proximity of some Greek islands to the Turkish mainland could make such an operation appear attractive to Ankara, and if the Turks moved against one of the smaller, lightly defended islands, they would probably be successful. If the Turks tried to invade one of the six well-defended major islands, however, we believe they would have difficulty for several reasons:

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Under this scenario we believe the Greeks could probably foil a Turkish invasion attempt against one of the major islands. If the Turks were successful, we believe the Greeks would probably be able to marshal the force necessary to retake an island, although the ensuing combat almost certainly would be costly to both sides.

The Turks would be more likely to succeed in launching operations against the Greeks in Cyprus. The Turks have superior manpower there, and even with their obsolete equipment they almost certainly could make major territorial gains against the Cypriot National Guard (CNG). The Cypriot force has upgraded its equipment since the Turkish invasion in 1974 and is now a more credible fighting force, but it still has little capability to initiate offensive operations on its own. While the CNG could not stop the Turks from taking additional territory, the Cypriots could make the operations costly in terms of lives and equipment.

- o Greek strikes on Turkish airfields -- In this situation the Greeks probably would try to take the Turkish Air Force out of the war either at the outset of fighting -- before the Turks could take advantage of their greater number of aircraft -- or following an unpremeditated air clash resulting in Greek losses.

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25X1 Implications of a Conflict

Any conflict between Greece and Turkey, whatever the outcome, is likely to damage vital Western interests. Together, Greece and Turkey form a critical part of Western defenses on the southeastern flank of NATO, in terms of both the forces they provide and the bases and intelligence monitoring facilities used by the United States and other Allies. In addition, RDF contingency planning for Southwest Asia, the protection of oil supply lines from the Middle East [redacted] all hinge on an effective and committed Allied effort in the eastern Mediterranean. In short, the loss of either Greece or Turkey--or both--would seriously impair the ability of the United States and NATO to monitor and respond to Soviet activity within and outside the region. [redacted] 25X6

25X1 The potential costs to the West of a conflict between Greece and Turkey were brought into vivid relief during the 1974 Cyprus crisis. Greece--under the pro-West government of Constantine Karamanlis--withdrew from NATO to protest the Alliance's failure to prevent the Turkish invasion of the island. Turkey--under the pro-West leadership of Suleyman Demirel--took control of the US military facilities in Turkey [redacted] 25X6

25X6 [redacted] in response to an embargo by Washington on military equipment and sales. Moreover, both Athens and Ankara demanded the renegotiation of their respective base agreements with Washington. Both countries had considered themselves model allies, and both felt betrayed by the Western response to the crisis. Some nine years later, Greek and Turkish relations with the United States and NATO still reflect that legacy. [redacted] 25X1

The perception by either Greece or Turkey in any future crisis of a NATO or US tilt toward the other almost certainly would prompt either or both to withdraw from NATO, shut down US facilities, or do both. Even if both countries remained in NATO, the heavy casualties and the loss of equipment likely to result from a conflict would degrade Western military capabilities in the eastern Mediterranean. A full assessment of the loss would depend, of course, on the conflict scenario and the outcome of the fighting. [redacted] 25X1

The Soviets clearly would be the net beneficiary--militarily and

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politically--of any future conflict between Greece and Turkey. Like Western governments, the Soviets generally have avoided taking sides in the disputes between Greece and Turkey, and it is unlikely that they would become directly involved in localized fighting between the two. But open hostilities would also have unwelcome repercussions for Moscow. A Greek declaration of a 12-mile territorial sea, for example, would affect Soviet shipping and the Red Navy's floating supply and repair facility off the island of Kithira. In addition, open hostilities would almost certainly lead to the temporary closure of the Turkish Straits, thus cutting Moscow off from the Mediterranean. [redacted]

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As long as the numerous disputes between Greece and Turkey remain unresolved, the tension between the two will continue to affect each country's relations with the US and detract from each party's ability to focus on NATO's primary mission. Although present circumstances make a war between Greece and Turkey improbable, the potential for hostilities could grow if solutions to the bilateral dispute remain elusive. [redacted]

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